The Council also discussed the Report of the Group of Eminent Persons and directed the SAARC Secretary General to prepare a draft statement on the "Future Vision of SAARC" for consideration by the Council of Ministers and the SAARC Summit.

The External Affairs Minister had a bilateral meeting with the Foreign Minister of Pakistan on 19 March, 1999 on the sidelines of the Meeting of the SAARC Council of Ministers. The Joint Statement incorporating the decisions taken in the meeting is enclosed. (*See* below)

(d) No issues concerning bilateral relations between India and Pakistan were discussed in the SAARC Meeting. A positive reference was made by the Standing Committee to the reaffirmation of the SAARC goals and objectives in the Lahore Declaration."

Joint Statement

The Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Sartaj Aziz and the Minister of External Affairs of India, Shri Jaswant Singh met today on the sidelines of the 21st Session of the SAARC Council of Ministers at Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka.

They reiterated the historic significance of the Lahore Declaration which embodies the vision of the Prime Ministers of the two countries for ending the legacy of tensions and conflicts of the past fifty years and for ushering a new era of peace, security and prosperity. They discussed ways and means to build on the Lahore Declaration which commits the two countries to build trust and confidence, develop mutually beneficial cooperation and intensify their efforts to resolve all outstanding issues including Jammu and Kashmir.

The two Foreign Ministers agreed on the urgency of taking concrete measures for implementation of the Lahore Declaration, the Memorandum of Understanding and the Joint Statement issued during the Lahore Summit. In this context the Ministers agreed that the composite and integrated dialogue process must be intensified.

The Ministers agreed to the following:

(i) The meetings of Experts for implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding will be held over the next two months.

(ii) The next round of the composite and integrated dialogue process in accordance with the agreed agenda will commence in May 1999 in New Delhi and Islamabad and will be held over a period of six weeks.

(iii) They will meet shortly after the conclusion of the May-June Round of the composite and integrated dailogue process.

(iv) The Committee on humanitarian issues composed of Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan and the Minister of State of External Affairs of India set up by the Prime Ministers at the Lahore Summit will meet in April 1999 to formalise the agreement on the issue of release of civilian prisoners as well as to discuss other humanitarian issues.

(v) That both sides have agreed to relax the visa regime for several categories of visitors. The specific visa relaxation measures shall be announced by the two Governments shortly.

(vi) Delegations of experts from India shall visit Pakistan during April 1999 for identifying areas of cooperation in information technology, Y2K and WTO-related issues.

Squandering of public money by Indian missions

2702. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) how much public money has been squandered by our missions abroad in the matter of unauthorised retention of staff, replacement and renewal of furniture,

extravagant appointment of contingency paid chauffeur among other things in the last three years, mission-wise and year-wise;

(b) whether the squandering of public money have been inquired into the Government; if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action taken to safeguard the public money?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Retention of staff replacement and renewal of furniture and appointment of contingency paid staff including chauffeurs in missions abroad are done on functional grounds in accordance with well-laid down rules and procedure and any departures are subject to careful scrutiny and follow up action.

(b) The accounts and other records of the missions/posts are audited on a regular basis.

(c) A system of checks and balances is already in place to ensure that the public money is spent as per the rules and regulations in force.

Solution of Kashmir issue

2703. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA:
SHRI AMAR SINGH:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what are the details of the discussions and decisions arrived at the recent meeting with the Prime Minister of Pakistan;

(b) whether it is a fact that both the countries have identified some grey areas to resolve the most contentious dispute of Kashmir: and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) The Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, visited Pakistan on the inaugural run of the Delhi-Lahore-Delhi bus service on 20-21 February 1999. During his visit, the Prime Minister conveyed to the Government and people of Pakistan India's deep desire for peace and friendship with them and to develop a stable and comprehensive structure of cooperation for the benefit of the two peoples.

Prime Minister's discussions with the Pakistan Prime Minister were wide-ranging, covering the entire range of bilateral relations, regional cooperation within SAARC and issues of international concern. Prime Minister emphasised that the peoples of the two countries desire lasting peace and an environment where their security, progress and prosperity can be assured. For this purpose, he conveyed that it was essential that the forces of violence and terrorism be combated and the hands of the advocates of harmony, balance and realism be strengthened for the development of good neighbourly relations between the two countries.

Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of Pakistan signed the Lahore Declaration on 21 February 1999. The Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Confidence Building Measures. A Joint Statement was also issued at the conclusion of the visit. This triad of documents aims at moving the relationship forward across a broad front by building trust and confidence, exploring avenues of mutually beneficial cooperation and addressing outstanding issues. It is noteworthy that in both the Lahore Declaration and the Memorandum of Understanding, India and Pakistan have reaffirmed their determination to implementing the Simla Agreement in letter and spirit. The Simla Agreement remains the cornerstone for the conduct of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan.

In the Lahore Declaration, the Prime Ministers have agreed that the two countries will intensify efforts to resolve all